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Interpretation and Education

Through interpretive and educational programs, the National Park Service will instill in park visitors an understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the significance of parks and their resources. Interpretive and educational programs will encourage the development of a personal stewardship ethic, and broaden public support for preserving park resources.



Through 'hands on' experiences, young people learn about park resources and the care that is needed to protect them.

The purpose of National Park Service interpretive and educational programs is to provide memorable educational and recreational experiences, and to foster the development of a personal stewardship ethic. The Service's programs will do this by forging a connection between park resources, visitors, the community, and park management. Programs will be successful when they use the right combination of original objects and places, firsthand experience, and effective media. For the purposes of this chapter, the terms "visitor" and "park visitor" are defined as anyone who uses a park's interpretive and educational services, regardless of where such use occurs.

The Service will maintain the organizational capability to deliver high-quality interpretive services. High-quality interpretation will be the shared responsibility of all levels of NPS staff, from the Washington and regional directorates, through park superintendents and chief interpreters, to field interpreters and non-interpretive staff. It will be achieved through interpretive and educational services, media, ongoing research, planning, technical excellence in implementation, a well-trained staff, broad public input, and continual reevaluation.

Enjoyment of the parks and their resources is a fundamental part of the visitor experience. That experience is heightened when it progresses from enjoyment to an understanding of the reasons for a park's existence and the significance of its resources. In order to quantify the visitor experience, and in compliance with GPRA, the levels of visitor satisfaction, safety, understanding, and appreciation will be measured.

A fully developed park interpretive and educational program will offer visitors a variety of opportunities to gain understanding and appreciation of park sites and the values they represent. Such opportunities will provide knowledge of park resources and the care needed to protect them, and allow visitors to participate in a recreational activity or a dialogue about park resources. Director's Order #6 and Reference Manual 6 provide additional guidance for the development of interpretive and educational programs.

7.1 Interpretive and Educational Programs

Each park's interpretive and educational program will be grounded in (1) park resources, (2) themes related to the park's legislative history and significance, and (3) park and Service-wide mission goals. The intent will be to provide each visitor with an interpretive experience that is enjoyable and inspirational, within the context of the park's tangible resources and the values they represent. In addition, visitors should be made aware of the purposes and scope of the national park system. Interpretation will encourage dialogue, and accept that visitors have their own individual points of view. Factual information presented will be current, accurate, based on current scholarship and science, and delivered so as to convey park meanings, with the understanding that audience members will draw their own conclusions. Interpretation will also reach out to park neighbors and community decision-makers, to stimulate discussions about the park and its values in local, regional, and national contexts. In addition, interpretive services will help park employees better understand the park's history, resources, processes, and visitors.

An effective park interpretive and educational program will include:

- *Informational and orientation programs* that provide visitors with easy access to the information they need to have a safe and enjoyable park experience.
- *Interpretive programs* that provide both on- and off-site presentations, and are designed to encourage visitors to form their own intellectual or emotional connections with the resource. All successful interpretive programs achieve significance by linking specific tangible artifacts, buildings, and places with ideas, events, and concepts. Interpretive programs facilitate a connection between the interests of visitors and the meanings of the park.
- *Curriculum-based educational programs* that link park themes to national standards and state curricula, and involve educators in planning and development. These programs usually include pre-visit and post-visit materials, address different learning styles, include an evaluation mechanism, and provide learning experiences linked directly to clear objectives. Programs develop a thorough understanding of a park's resources in individual, regional, national, and global contexts, and of the park's place within the national park system.
- *Interpretive media* that provide visitors with relevant park information, and facilitate more in-depth understanding of—and personal connection with—park themes and resources.

(See *Air Quality 4.7*; *Geologic Resource Management 4.8*; *Wilderness Interpretation and Education 6.4.2*; *Energy Management 9.1.7*; *Visitor Facilities 9.3*)

7.2 Interpretive Planning

7.2.1. General

Interpretive services and facilities will be developed and operated in accordance with the NPS Organic Act and Strategic Plan, and each park's enabling legislation, general management plan, strategic plan, resource management plan, and comprehensive interpretive plan (CIP). A park's CIP will be closely related to its general management plan. Standards for ensuring high-quality interpretive and educational programs are prescribed in Director's Order #6 and Reference Manual 6.

The management plans, CIP, and other interpretive documents for each park will establish a balance of in-park and outreach interpretive services, based upon criteria such as park significance statements and themes, levels and types of visitor use, the nature of park resources, and park management goals. A variety of tools, such as personal services, publications, exhibits, and audiovisual presentations, will be used to enhance a park's interpretive and educational programs, provide visitors with relevant information, and ensure a high-quality park experience. Recognition that concessioners, cooperating associations, friends groups, and other partners may have an important role in providing interpretive and educational services is most important in planning for the overall visitor services program, and such entities should be included where appropriate in the planning process.

7.2.2 Comprehensive Interpretive Plan

All parks will have a current CIP as defined in Director's Order #6 and Reference Manual 6. The CIP, initiated by the superintendent, and prepared by field staff with support from a regional office or the Harpers Ferry Center (HFC), will form the overall long-term vision and basis for decisions about interpretive and educational programs in the park. It will provide both long- and short-range views, and deal with all media and personal services. The CIP will include the long-range interpretive plan, the annual interpretive plan, and the interpretive database.

7.3 Personal and Non-Personal Services

7.3.1 Personal Services

Personal interpretive services are those in which staff interact with visitors. Examples of personal service programs include the staffing of visitor centers and contact stations, talks, illustrated programs, conducted activities, demonstrations, performing arts, junior ranger programs, special events, and educational programs. Each park will offer a wide variety of personal service programs that take into consideration audience characteristics and available time.

7.3.2 Non-personal Services

Non-personal interpretive services are those that do not require the presence of staff. Media such as park folders and other publications, museum and visitor center exhibits, wayside exhibits, web pages, audiovisual presentations, and radio information systems are all examples. Non-personal services, which can reach large audiences, will maintain a consistent quality of presentation over time. In conjunction with personal services, they will provide opportunities for visitor information, orientation, and understanding of park resources. A Service-wide standard for all NPS informational media will be established.

HFC will be responsible for interpretive media planning, design and production for museum and visitor center exhibits, wayside exhibits, audiovisual productions, publications, and directional signage. Plans or proposals to be accomplished by parks and regions, including privately funded projects, may be reviewed by HFC for appropriateness and quality of design and execution. Proposals from concessioners, cooperating associations, and others may also be reviewed. Projects excluded from the review process include site bulletins, bulletin boards, and other park-initiated or park-approved small projects of a non-permanent nature.

Parks will be responsible for the conservation of historic furnishings and artifacts on exhibit in parks. They may obtain conservation services from HFC or from outside contractors.

(See Acquisition, Management, and Disposition 5.3.5.5.4; Historic Furnishings 5.3.5.5.5; Ethnographic Resources 5.3.5.3; Viewing Devices 9.3.1.6; Interpretation by Concessioners 10.2.4.3. Also see Director's Orders #52C: Park Signage and #70: Internet and Intranet Publications)

7.3.3 Electronic Interpretation

Parks should use electronic communications, such as the Internet and long-distance learning, to enhance their informational, orientation, interpretive, and educational programs. The National Park Service will maintain a site on the World Wide

Web to provide an opportunity for all parks and programs to reach beyond their borders to a world-wide audience. Each park will maintain a home page for the purpose of reaching this audience. Park home pages will comply with Director's Order #70: Internet and Intranet Publications. The world of electronic communications is rapidly and constantly changing, and the NPS will take advantage of developing new technologies that have the potential for even greater service to the visiting public.

7.4 Interpretive Competencies and Skills

A high-quality interpretive and educational program requires a well-trained staff. Park managers will require NPS interpretive personnel, and any non-NPS groups or individuals that provide interpretive and educational services to the public on behalf of the NPS, to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective interpretation. All NPS interpreters will meet the certification standards for their essential competencies identified in the interpretive development program.

(See Interpretive and Educational Partnerships 7.6; Cooperating Associations 7.6.2; Interpretation by Concessioners 10.2.4.3)

7.5 Requirements for All Interpretive and Educational Services

The following must be considered in the development of all personal and non-personal services:

7.5.1 Access to Interpretive and Educational Opportunities

The National Park Service will ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that persons with disabilities receive the same interpretive opportunities as non-disabled persons. Interpretive and educational programs, exhibits, audiovisual programs, publications, and all other interpretive media will comply with Department of the Interior regulations at 43 CFR part 17, subpart E, and with standards required by the Architectural Barriers Act. Accordingly, the Park Service will ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, all programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate. Additionally, the Service will take all feasible steps to ensure effective communication with individuals with hearing and visual impairments by providing appropriate auxiliary aids, where necessary, in order to afford the opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, NPS programs and activities. These steps should include but not be limited to providing sign-language interpreters for visitors with hearing impairments, and providing audio, Braille, and large-print versions of printed materials for those with visual or cognitive disabilities.

Efforts will also be made to ensure that interpretive and educational programs meet the special needs of children, senior citizens, non-English speaking visitors, and the economically disadvantaged. Foreign-language translations of park publications will be provided in those parks visited by substantial numbers of non-English-speaking visitors.

(See Physical Access for Persons with Disabilities 5.3.2; Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities 8.2.4; Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities 9.1.2; Accessibility of Commercial Services 10.2.6.2. Also see Director's Order #42; Reference Manual 41; 43 CFR 17.550)

7.5.2 Interpretive and Educational Services Beyond Park Boundaries

Outreach services are an active part of a balanced visitor services program. A planned outreach program is essential to each unit of the national park system, and firmly establishes parks as parts of the local, national, and global communities.

Outreach should be used to disseminate park information, and interpretive and educational programs, beyond park boundaries. All parks have a responsibility to offer interpretive and educational opportunities to members of the public who are unable to make on-site visits.

7.5.3 Resource Issue Interpretation and Education

Park managers are increasingly called upon to make difficult resource decisions, some of which may be highly controversial. Interpretive and educational programs can build public understanding of, and support for, such decisions and initiatives, and for the NPS mission in general. Therefore, parks should, in balanced and appropriate ways, thoroughly integrate resource issues and initiatives of local and Service-wide importance into their interpretive and educational programs. Whenever possible, the appropriate interpretive managers at the national, regional, or park level should be involved in the process. In instances in which programming affects resources managed by other agencies, such agencies should be consulted during program planning. For resource issue interpretation to be effective, frontline interpretive staff must be informed about the reasoning that guided the decision-making process, and interpreters must present balanced views. Resource issue interpretation should be integrated into both on- and off-site programs, as well as into printed and electronic media whenever appropriate. The education of residents and officials of gateway and neighboring communities, the region, and the state(s) surrounding a park about resource issues and broad initiatives is often the most effective means of eliminating resource threats and gaining support for the Service's policy choices.

7.5.4 Research

Interpretive and educational programs will be based on current scholarship and research about the history, science, and condition of park resources, and on research about the needs, expectations, and behavior of visitors. To accomplish this, a dialogue must be established and maintained among interpreters, education specialists, resource managers, scientists, archeologists, sociologists, ethnographers, historians, and other experts, for the purpose of offering the most current and accurate programs to the public.

(See Park Planning Processes 2.3)

7.5.5 Consultation

The National Park Service will present factual and balanced presentations of the many American cultures, heritages, and histories. Consultation with diverse constituencies is essential to the development of effective and meaningful interpretive and educational programs, because it (1) ensures appropriate content and accuracy, and (2) identifies multiple points of view and potentially sensitive issues. When appropriate, state and local agencies involved in heritage tourism and history (such as state historic preservation officers) should be included in consultations to foster coordination and partnerships. Acknowledging multiple points of view does not require interpretive and educational programs to

provide equal time, or to disregard the weight of scientific or historical evidence.

The Service will actively consult traditionally associated peoples and other cultural and community groups in the planning, development, presentation, and operation of park interpretive programs and media relating to their cultures and histories. Cooperative programs will be developed with tribal governments and cultural groups to help the NPS present accurate perspectives on their cultures. Ethnographic or cultural anthropological data and concepts will also be used in interpretive programs, as appropriate. The Service will not display Native American human remains or photographs of those remains. Drawings, renderings, or casts of such remains will not be displayed without the consent of culturally affiliated Indian tribes and native Hawaiian organizations. The Service may exhibit non-Native American remains, photographs, drawings, renderings, or casts thereof, in consultation with traditionally associated peoples. The Service will consult with culturally affiliated or traditionally associated peoples to determine the religious status of any object whose sacred nature is suspected but not confirmed. These consultations will occur before such an object is exhibited or any action is taken that may have an adverse effect on its religious qualities.

(See Evaluation and Categorization 5.1.3.2; Stewardship of Human Remains and Burials 5.3.4; Ethnographic Resources 5.3.5.3; Museum Collections 5.3.5.5)

7.5.6 Cultural Demonstrators

Cultural demonstrators can provide unique insights into their cultures. In order to facilitate their successful interaction with the public, parks may provide cultural demonstrators with training and direction. Cultural demonstrators (in parks outside the National Capital Region) who are not NPS employees may be permitted to sell self-made handcraft items to park visitors, keeping the proceeds for themselves, where such handcrafts are related to the park's interpretive themes. This is allowed under 16 USC 1a-2(g), which authorizes the sale of products produced in the conduct of living exhibits, interpretive demonstrations, or park programs. When this practice is permitted, all materials used in creating such items must be the private property of the demonstrator, collected from outside the park. The superintendent may permit this practice through a cooperative agreement, special use permit, concession contract, or other legal contract.

Titles 8 and 13 of ANILCA regulate the taking of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources for subsistence and other purposes in the Alaska parks.

(See Special Events 8.6.2; Collecting Natural Products 8.8; Merchandise 10.2.4.4. Also see 36 CFR 5.3; 60 FR 17639)

7.5.7 Historic Weapons

All uses of historic weapons in parks will strictly comply with the Historic Weapons Demonstrations Safety Standards contained in Reference Manual 6, and will follow the procedures specified therein for the particular weapon(s) being used.

Weapons firing demonstrations conducted in areas administered by the NPS are restricted to reproduction black-powder weapons only. Original NPS museum weapons will not be

used; no exemptions will be granted. Requests by outside groups or individuals to use non-NPS original weapons will follow the exemption request procedure prescribed in Reference Manual 6, and will be granted or denied in writing by the superintendent.

7.5.8 Reenactments

Battle re-enactments and demonstrations of battle tactics that involve exchanges of fire between opposing lines, the taking of casualties, hand-to-hand combat, or any other form of simulated warfare, are prohibited in all parks. Battle re-enactments create an atmosphere inconsistent with the memorial qualities of the battlefields and other military sites placed in the Service's trust.

7.6 Interpretive and Educational Partnerships

In planning and implementing interpretive and educational programs, superintendents should consider the use of volunteers, concessioners, cooperating associations, field schools and institutes, friends groups, and private individuals to supplement park staff and funds. Such services will not be used as a replacement or substitute for a park's basic interpretive operation. To ensure quality control and appropriateness, NPS interpretive staff will be involved with the planning, approval, training, monitoring, and evaluation of all interpretive services provided by others. Non-NPS personnel providing interpretive services should be offered an opportunity to complete the appropriate interpretive development program training module(s), and/or seek certification in the appropriate competency(ies).

(See Interpretive Competencies and Skills 7.4; Cooperating Associations 7.6.2; Interpretation by Concessioners 10.2.4.3)

7.6.1 Volunteers in the Parks

Volunteer services may be used in various aspects of park operations under the authority of the Volunteers in the Parks

Act of 1969. Pursuant to this legislation, volunteers may be recruited without regard to civil service regulations; are covered for tort liability and work-injury compensation; and may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses while participating in the program. Volunteers will be accepted without regard to race, creed, religion, age, sex, color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. Volunteers will not displace NPS employees. NPS housing may be used for volunteers only if available and not needed for NPS employees. Director's Order #7 and Reference Manual 7 provide additional guidance for the volunteer program.

(See Protection 5.3.5.1.4; Housing Management Plans 9.4.3.4. Also see Handbook 36 on Housing)

7.6.2 Cooperating Associations

When appropriate, cooperating associations will join the National Park Service in presenting interpretive and educational programs, and in supporting research efforts as authorized in 16 USC 1-3, 6, and 17j-(2)e. Enabled by a standard, non-negotiable cooperating association agreement, cooperating associations may, consistent with a park's scope-of-sales statement, purchase for re-sale, or produce for sale, interpretive and educational items that are directly related to the understanding and interpretation of the park or the national park system. Associations may offer appropriate and approved interpretive services that support but do not supplant interpretive and educational services offered by the NPS. Associations may accept donations on behalf of the Service when appropriate, and when conducted through approved fund-raising efforts. Service housing may be used for cooperating association employees only if available and not needed for NPS employees. Guidance for managing NPS partnerships with cooperating associations is included in Director's Order #32 and Reference Manual 32.

(See Housing Management Plans 9.4.3.4. Also see Director's Order #21: Donations and Fundraising; Handbook 36 on Housing)